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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BELGRADE 000029

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA

AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO AMCONSUL ALMATY

AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG

AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/12

TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC SR

SUBJECT: Serbia: Deputy Prime Minister Ivica Dacic to Ambassador:
Will Investigate Embassy Attack/Bytyqi Murders

REF: BELGRADE 118; 09 BELGRADE 1092; 09 BELGRADE 1092

CLASSIFIED BY: Mary Warlick, Ambassador, US Department of State, US
Embassy Belgrade; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

¶1. (C) Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Ivica Dacic told the Ambassador, during her February 9 courtesy call, that following his meetings and recent trip to the United States he was committed to expanding our police cooperation on training and operational issues. He assured the Ambassador of his ministry's fullest cooperation in resolving the Bytyqi case and the much delayed investigation into the 2008 attack on Embassy Belgrade. Serbia was committed to improving regional cooperation and expanding its police participation in both EU- and UN-led missions. He noted growing cooperation with Russia but insisted it was limited to disaster preparedness, fully transparent, and inclusive of regional neighbors. Politically, Dacic said the coalition government was secure and could see out its mandate (through 2012). Dacic said he was intent on transforming his Socialist Party (SPS) into a pro-European, pro-reform party, which he saw as a natural coalition partner with the Democratic Party (DS). We should follow up on any specifics related to his U.S. visit and believe sustained bilateral engagement on a wide range of law enforcement issues will continue to benefit U.S. interests. End Summary.

Trip to United States a Success

¶2. (C) Dacic called his January 28 - February 6 trip to the United States (Ref A) politically historic and successful, noting that he was the first SPS official permitted to visit the United States for nearly two decades. He said he wanted to build upon his meetings with State, Justice, FBI, and the NYPD to foster further cooperation. He noted specific interest in cooperation on

organized crime, narco-trafficking, and terrorism. In addition, he said he was interested in improving Serbian techniques in witness protection and asset seizure. He suggested finding ways to facilitate police exchanges, including with both the FBI and NYPD. Dacic said that during his visit he personally invited Attorney General Holder, FBI Director Mueller, and NYPD officials to Belgrade. Dacic said he would follow up these verbal invitations with more specific dates.

Serbian Cooperation on Specific Cases

¶13. (S) Dacic described specific recent cooperation with the United States on law enforcement matters and assured that such cooperation would continue. Dacic said that while he was in Washington the FBI had specifically requested information on an ethnic Albanian with ties to Serbia who is connected to the "Charlotte Seven," a group currently under indictment in the United States on terrorism-related charges. Dacic reconfirmed for the Ambassador the "need to exchange information on this case." Dacic also highlighted his ministry's cooperation with U.S. law enforcement officials on drug smuggling and child pornography cases.

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Bytyqi Case

¶14. (C) In an effort to resolve the Bytyqi case (Ref B), Dacic said the MOI would conduct an internal investigation in order to "put pressure" on MOI officers who may have information or had been involved in the murder of the three American brothers in 1999. He explained that during his tenure at MOI all the action regarding Bytyqi had been with the Justice Ministry and lamented that because the crimes had happened so long ago there was "no strong proof" of who was responsible. He said he was surprised by the September 2009 acquittal of two defendants, but, trying to sound positive, said that action now permitted him to look into the matter. Outlining the next steps, Dacic said the MOI investigation would focus on who actually performed the crime and gathering the evidence to prove it. From there he said it "would be easy to find the line to the top," although he doubted there had ever been a written order for the deaths. He said his predecessor's mistake was that the ministry had started the investigation at the top, trying from the beginning to determine who had given the order for the deaths. This had led to a "conspiracy of silence" among officials. He stressed that all persons who were present during the Bytyqi detention could not be held responsible, saying "if all are accused, then none will admit."

Investigation into Embassy Attack

¶15. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's urging, Dacic said he would also support efforts to fully investigate the February 2008 attack on Embassy Belgrade. Once again he clarified that the event had happened "before my time as Minister." He acknowledged that an investigation had never been conducted under former Prime Minister Kostunica. The MOI "is here to solve problems, compared to other ministries that create them," Dacic said (in a clear reference to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Trafficking in Persons

¶6. (SBU) Dacic said Serbia had made significant progress on TIP issues, including implementing a U.S.-proposed strategy to improve victim shelters and a victim referral system. He promised further efforts to work on data collection and prosecution. "We need to increase awareness of the issue," Dacic said.

Growing Serbian Role in Peace-Keeping Operations

¶7. (SBU) Serbia was ready and willing to increase its contributions to EU- and UN-led police peace-keeping operations, but was limited by funding, Dacic stressed. UN operations were

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easier, since some financing was assumed by the UN, but if Serbia participated in EU efforts, financing became more of an issue. Dacic said he was willing to send an entire police unit (100 persons) to Haiti, to supplement Serbia's current five-person contribution to MINUSTAH. Dacic's Chief of Staff Branko Lazarevic added that Serbia was immediately prepared to offer 25 police officers to be deployed to Haiti with the Italians. Dacic said he had told the EU's Robert Cooper that Serbia was ready to participate in EU missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan and that Serbia was waiting to hear back from the EU on next steps, such as signing an MOU. Since these were police (and not military) operations, parliamentary approval for the deployment was not needed, making it politically feasible, said Dacic.

Russia

¶8. (C) Dacic played down the perceived growing role of Russia in the region, but acknowledged Russia was exploring increased cooperation with Serbia on disaster response and assistance. Dacic told the Ambassador that Russia had presented a proposal to create a regional disaster assistance center in Nis, Serbia (Ref C) and that discussions were currently underway. He stressed that such a center would be "non-military, for disaster assistance, and regional in nature." Providing further rationale, Dacic said the small countries of the Balkan region did not have the individual capacity to respond to disasters such as fires, flooding, or earthquakes. Prepositioning equipment, such as planes or helicopters, would allow countries of the region to pool resources. Dacic stressed that the initiative was "just an idea at this stage," and it was uncertain whether it would become a reality. The center would be discussed at a regional conference to be held on February 17 in Belgrade, Dacic said, which Russian Minister for Emergency Preparedness (EMERCOM) Shoigu would attend. He credited Russia for publicizing its limited humanitarian assistance in Serbia, predominantly demining, suggesting that Russia was good at self-promotion.

Regional Cooperation

¶9. (C) Dacic said under his leadership MOI cooperation with regional partners had significantly improved and was helping to stabilize the region. Dacic claimed that Croatia was Serbia's best regional partner with significant cooperation on organized crime. He noted good relations with Slovenia and highlighted his upcoming trip to Albania in March to meet with his counterpart. He sarcastically lamented that the only problem appeared to be with Montenegro, where he said all criminals wanted by Serbia appear to be "lost" by Montenegrin authorities. (Note: Montenegro released on February 10 two suspected drug smugglers wanted in Serbia in connection with the Saric drug ring.)

Coalition Stable

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¶10. (SBU) Turning to political matters, Dacic said that the ruling coalition was stable and would be able to see out its mandate until Spring 2012. He said the goal was to preserve the coalition and said early elections were not in the coalition's interest. He acknowledged the competing interests of coalition partners, saying that quarreling within the coalition only benefitted the opposition, specifically Tomislav Nikolic and his Progressive Party (SNS).

A Stronger SPS for a Stronger Future Coalition

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¶11. (SBU) The SPS needed to become a stronger party so it could "more easily form a majority with Tadic's DS in future elections, although I don't think either the DS or the SNS understand this," Dacic said. Dacic said the SPS was currently polling around 7.5% nationally; if SPS could reach 10%, then DS, SPS and smaller ethnic minority parties could form future governments. He acknowledged growing his base would take time and party reform.

¶12. (SBU) Internal party reform was essential, Dacic said, declaring that the SPS was undergoing a "new start." He said this reform would be rolled out at a party congress by the end of 2010 and would emphasize "EU and Social Democratic values," noting that the SPS was currently in the first stage of joining the Socialist International. To replace its aging membership, SPS was targeting younger voters and would seek to poach voters from DSS, SNS, and the SRS.

Comment

¶13. (C) Still on a natural high from his trip to the United States, Dacic was confident in himself, his party, and his current role as political kingmaker. Although much more of a natural politician than a policeman, Dacic has grown comfortable in his role as Serbia's primary law enforcer. This confidence has permitted him to be forward leaning on issues important to us, such as regional cooperation on organized crime and Serbian participation in PKO deployments. He was less forthcoming on Serbia's relations with Russia and likely intentionally downplayed Russia's efforts in the region. Interestingly absent from the discussion was any comment on his progress toward long-overdue reform of the Interior Ministry. We will continue to encourage him

to take the tough decisions regarding reforming the Interior Ministry and SPS, to be transparent with his international partners, and to pursue the Bytyqi and Embassy attack investigations. We should also work to follow up on any specifics related to his U.S. visit and believe sustained bilateral engagement with him and his Ministry on a wide range of law enforcement issues will continue to benefit U.S. interests. End Comment.

WARLICK